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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001024

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: REGIME STABILITY QUESTIONED BY RECENT INCIDENTS

REF: 04 ABUJA 1885

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (B & D).

11. (S) SUMMARY: Joseph Wayas, the chairman of the political committee at the National Conference on Political Reform (Confab), avoided an apparent assassination attempt on June 3 and has been absent from the Confab since the incident. President Obasanjo apparently collapsed twice on June 7, sparking rumors of his death and vehement denials from the GON. These two events highlight continuing concerns about security throughout the country.

12. (C) Joseph Wayas, Chairman of the Political Committee at the National Conference on Political Reform (Confab), avoided an apparent assassination attempt on June 3 when he did not return to his office after the Confab closed. According to his personal assistant, a "group" of thugs forced their way into his office shortly before he was due to return. One of Wayas' friends told Poloff that the group had apparently been observing Wayas for over a week and that Wayas decided at the last minute to return to his residence rather than stopping at his office. The gang was characterized as "assassins" by his PA.

13. (C) Wayas has not attended the Confab since the incident and has been avoiding many of its members. According to one, the Political Committee has been looking for him this week to iron out their recommendations to the Confab before it closes late this month.

13. (C) COMMENT: Wayas, a former Senate President, has been critical of the Confab of late, especially on the handling of the draft constitution that appeared late during term of the conference. This draft, attributed to President Obasanjo and his advisers Professor Jerry Gana and Ojo Maduekwe, is believed to represent Obasanjo's preferred constitution moving towards the 2007 elections. Standing up to the PDP has proved dangerous in the past (reftel) and Wayas' avoidance of the conference is believed to be an indication of his concern about his own health. END COMMENT.

14. (S) In an unrelated incident, rumors of the death of President Obasanjo swirled through the country on June 7. Beginning before daybreak, the word spread from North to South by the end of the day. The concern about his health was apparently triggered by two incidents the same day. According to Obasanjo's steward, Obasanjo collapsed in the early morning hours. At about the same time, according to a presidential orderly, an emergency call came from the Presidential Villa to the State House Clinic for "oxygen" and an ambulance. The steward claims that Obasanjo collapsed again at about 1300 hrs local just before a meeting with the Kogi State Governor. This time, the steward says that they revived him one time but he was unable to stand. He then collapsed and, according to another source, was unconscious for about two hours.

15. (C) According to one of the Kogi Governor's aides, the group never met with Obasanjo throughout the day, but was hopeful of meeting today. A foreign diplomat claims that he met with Obasanjo on June 8 and that he "appeared well." The diplomat also reported that Obasanjo is leaving for London almost immediately for "consultations and speeches," coincidentally the location of his preferred private physician.

16. (C) Presidential spokesperson Remi Oyo was on network television and radio on the evening of June 7 stating that the President was in good health and had kept all his appointments for the day. According to one contact who saw the broadcast, she appeared "nervous or shaken" and did not give her usual "composed delivery." The print media on June 8 was plastered with several articles denying the "vicious rumor of the President's ill-health" and providing testimonials of the President's "great stamina."

17. (S) COMMENT: It appears that something happened to Obasanjo on June 7 and that he actually did collapse once, if not twice. A similar story made the rounds in December, when many claimed that he collapsed unconscious at his Otta Farm in Ogun State. These two incidents indicate that Obasanjo, who claims to be 68 but many think is closer to 75 years old, may have a health problem, although we have no indication what ailment it might be. The speed of the rumors, and the attack on Wayas highlights a different, perhaps more serious

issue: regime fragility. Continued physical and personal attacks on Obasanjo's opponents and the lack of security throughout the country point to the dangers present to the GON in the near future. The speed with which the rumors of his death (and the glee they generated in some quarters) only reinforces the fact that at least some in Nigeria stand to gain from the demise of Obasanjo and the regime. END
COMMENT.
CAMPBELL